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RABELAIS,—A SOURCE FOR *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

For a long time the Rabelaisian element in *Gulliver* has been recognized, and a debt assumed. Sir Walter Scott pointed out, with perfect accuracy, that the occupations of the pedants in the Academy of Lagado, in the third voyage, are largely modelled upon Rabelais' account of the Abstractors in the Court of Queen Whim.¹ Further debt to Rabelais has been noted in the incident of Gulliver extinguishing the fire at the palace in Lilliput,² which resembles the joke played by Gargantua upon the Parisians. The parallel is first of all in the coarse situation (a giant urinating shamelessly in the presence of a crowd of pygmies); and secondly, in the devastation and wide-spread terror produced in each case by the flood.³ Swift also seems to have a passage of Rabelais in mind, when he makes Gulliver comment on the shabby ancestry of the world's aristocracy that passes in review before his eyes in Glubdubdrib.⁴ The satire in both accounts is the same, namely that popes and princes are, in reality, bred from a long line of pick-pockets and gamesters.

The above is a summary of the alleged borrowings, all of which have been commented upon by critics of *Gulliver*.⁵ To these internal parallels I have nothing to add. So far, however, the debt has been inferred wholly from these parallels, which when examined, will be found inexact and unconvincing. May not Swift have copied some of the imitators of Rabelais, instead of

¹ Sir Walter Scott's edition of Swift, 1814, xi, 215-217 n., where he reprints Motteux' translation of Rabelais, Bk. V, ch. xxii.

² *Gulliver*, page 56; Rabelais, Bk. I, ch. xvii, page 70. All references to *Gulliver's Travels* are to the edition by G. R. Dennis, 1905; vol. viii of *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, edited by Temple Scott. References to and quotations from Rabelais are based on the translation by Urquhart and Motteux, completed in 1708, the text with which Swift himself was probably familiar. I have used the reprint in *The Tudor Translations*, edited by W. E. Henley, 1900.

³ Gulliver is banished from Lilliput, among other reasons, to prevent a recurrence of the disastrous flood. Compare also with similar situations in Rabelais, Bk. I, ch. xxxvi, page 126; Bk. I, ch. xxxviii, page 132.

⁴ *Gulliver*, page 208; Rabelais, Bk. I, ch. i, page 25.

⁵ See the source studies by Hönninger and Borkowsky, in *Anglia*, x and xv.

Rabelais himself?⁶ I shall here prove that Swift's mind was well stored with incidents from Rabelais, whose works he must have known almost by heart, since he was able to quote them off-hand in his correspondence, with verbal accuracy.

Not counting two vague references to Rabelais as a prevaricator and a satirist,⁷ Swift four times quotes him directly. In one of his contributions to the *Examiner* there is the following:

"I likewise remember the story of a giant in *Rabelais*, who used to feed upon windmills, but was unfortunately choked with a small lump of butter before a warm oven."⁸

The allusion is to the following:

"For one Widenostrils, a huge giant . . . choaked himself with eating a huge lump of fresh butter at the mouth of a hot oven."⁹

In a letter to Bolingbroke, Swift writes,—

"The poor dead queen is used much like the giant Lougarou in Rabelais. Pantagruel took Lougarou by the heels, and made him his weapon to kill twenty other giants, then flung him over a river into the town and killed two ducks and an old cat."¹⁰

The original in Rabelais is as follows:

"He threw the body of Loupgarou, as hard as he could against the city, where falling like a frog upon his belly . . . he with the said fall killed a singed he-cat, a wet she-cat, a farting duck and a bridled goose."¹¹

That Swift employed another story of Rabelais in some writing now lost is proved by the following statement of Bolingbroke in a letter to Swift:

"There never was a better application than yours of the story of Picrochole. The storks will never come, and they must be porters all their lives."¹²

⁶ See especially the ridicule of learning in the *Amusements Serious and Comical*, by Tom Brown, 1704; as discussed by Professor Elbert N. S. Thompson, in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 1917, vol. 32, pp. 90-94.

⁷ *Prose Works*, ix, 317; and x, 376.

⁸ *Contributions to the Examiner*, No. 20. December, 1710.

⁹ Rabelais, Bk. IV, ch. xvii, pages 102, 104.

¹⁰ Letter to Bolingbroke, Sept. 14, 1714.

¹¹ Rabelais, Bk. II, ch. xxix, page 319.

¹² Bolingbroke to Swift, March 17, 1718-19. The allusion is to Rabelais, Bk. I, ch. 49, page 162.

Finally, and most important of all, Swift alludes directly to one of the Abstractors of Queen Whim's court.

"For as to your scheme of raising one-hundred-and-ten-thousand pounds, it is as vain as that of Rabelais, which was to squeeze out wind from the posteriors of a dead ass."¹³

Not only is this last a correct quotation from Rabelais, but it will be recognized as an accurate statement of the experiment performed by the physician whom Gulliver visits in Lagado; except that the latter applies the bellows to a dog instead of to an ass.¹⁴

Swift knew the works of Rabelais. He quoted the latter's ridicule of scientific projectors, and reproduced it in *Gulliver's Travels*. I believe we may conclude with reason that, in writing *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift borrowed hints directly from Rabelais.

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REVIEWS

Beowulf, an Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn. By R. W. CHAMBERS. Cambridge: University Press, 1921. Pp. xii + 417.

The time is almost ripe for the compilation of a *Beowulf* variorum. Such, however, is not the task that Professor Chambers has set for himself in this masterly volume, although, when one does appear, his contributions will bulk large in its pages. If any fault is found with the present study, it is likely to be that he does not here supply a complete historical outline of scholarship concerning the poem; for so much is included that students will wish there had been even more. The book is divided into four parts:—the first covering three chapters, which deal, respectively with the Historical Elements, the Non-Historical Elements, and Theories as to the Origin, Date, and Structure of the Poem; the second presenting the Documents Illustrating the Stories in *Beowulf* and

¹³ *Prose Works*, VII., 114. *An Answer to a Paper Called, "A Memorial of the Poor Inhabitants of Ireland."*

¹⁴ Rabelais, Bk. V, ch. XXII, page 310; *Gulliver*, 189.